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EDITORIAL

A good deal of attention has been given to the languishing body of modern poetry in the Press lately. Some of it has been informative and interesting, some full of the superficiality and ignorance to be expected in those quarters. It has become fashionable to say that nobody can understand poets to-day, that they are so obscure that nobody but their friends read them. This, of course, is a wild statement which is completely untrue. In every generation there have been one or two poets who are using language as a fine-edge tool to make a picture which only they can produce. In the nineteenth century poets began to think profoundly again after the superficiality—often to childishness—of the eighteenth century and its romantic inheritors. Browning, Hopkins, the later Yeats, Pound, Eliot, and now Dylan Thomas, have all been accused of obscurity on good grounds. But what such critics forget is that contemporaneously with all these poets have been a whole stream of writers understandable at a first glance. Seventy-five per cent. of contemporary poetry could be easily read by an intelligent schoolboy of eighteen. For the other twenty-five per cent. there is a highly educated public of university standard which finds these texts easy enough, or at any rate possible of elucidation. All this is not the fault of poets who are writing to be read beyond their own generation, who will depend for their ultimate position on being picked out for study and commentary by the academic minds of the third millenium.

Perhaps it may be worthwhile recalling to younger poets a view held by an older generation, that poetry is an asceticism, as Paul Valery said, 'an exercise . . . a manoeuvre of myself by myself, rather than a work intended for the public.' The publication of a poem is an accident, its audience an irrevalence.

N. K. CRUICKSHANK

The Insane

(from the German of R. M. Rilke)

And since the mind's partitions are clean broken
They remain silent; cannot speak, as all
Hours when they might lucidly have spoken
Start then suffer a recall.

Often they find, to the dark window straying,
That all suddenly comes right.
Hands rest on what is real, hard, undismaying,
Hearts are uplifted and have strength for praying,
Eyes, grown tranquil, contemplate the sight

Of the unhoped-for, often much-deranged
Garden set in the reposeful square,
That, as the far world mirrors it, is changed,
Becoming larger still, and steadfast there.

The Solitary

(from the German of R. M. Rilke)

As one who's sailed across far wastes of sea,
I find their planted ways remote from mine;
Days brimful stand before them when they dine,
While distance only is quite full for me.

Into my vision's scope a world will glide,
Untrodden, it may be, as a moon's bare round;
They want no feeling that's not cut and dried
While all their speech has a well-trodden sound.

The things I brought from yonder now appear,
Alongside theirs, a changed, an alien band:
They hold their breath, as if for shame's sake, here.
Although wild beasts in their great native land,

KENNETH GEE

One Death And Many

That winter it was very cold:
  I walked at evening through the fragile land bound in frost.
Slowly through air drained of colour
  though as expectant as water quivering in a glass,
  ringing bells dropped spikes of ice.
The cold bells knocked their iron against my heart;
  I had waited all day for snow that did not come.

I heard the snow prepare
  wind for its fall, a rustle in the tiny dry grass
That grew like the last hairs of an old man, desperately;
  this window was a whimper by scraps of paper, shrill in
    guttered leaves.
When the wind rose the brittle world of ice would crumble,
  the stars of frost on the window glass,
  the veins of white in rutted, crusty lanes, all would tremble
And go down in roaring black night
  along with candlelight and fires: nothing would be left
  but darkness, myself blind in a winter bed.

When the snow fell,
  how happy we were shouting on the slopes,
  coming home through blue and white evenings:
It didn't matter if melting spring never arrived.

That was a winter of all winters cruellest:

The dog howled at the bolted door; the miserable bird
  stared at a dream of water under glass
  and pecked at berries with a beak of fury.
One man died in a ditch,
  the arrows of night airs piercing his breast:
He was found in the neutral light of dawn—
  a down-at-heel tramp on his back in snow:

The staring eyes that could no longer stare
knifed like a nightmare at the quick of daylight.
People like this expect no mercy from the weather
or from their own kind who harry them from home.

That was the winter my grandfather died:
he tumbled wildly with firelight in his hair,
among china and silver on the damask cloth.
A rage from outside like a gale had struck him down:
his old, lion's head,
pale yellow skin by white cloth,
Long afterwards determined the way that men are dead.

I see now the old man clapped down between boards,
his great body a crumble of bone and dust in a box.
There is not enough liquor in him now to fill a thimble
though he was a drinker in his time.
Many winters have since melted in a fire of flowers;
at any funeral, inside or outside war,
people have spoken the same ambiguous syllables:
For grief falls too hard and simple on them to be taken neat,
so that in Ireland there are wakes and men make merry coffins.

I did not imagine it:
There was a smell of death,—of earth, mould, rotted leaf;
from cold slab stone there came a breath like a razor's edge.
Men and women in black took tea
and talked happily of old times till that funeral sundown:
there would never be any days like those again;
The flowers in those gardens are withered, the guests all gone away,
the innocent, the kind, and those with malice
who even at the last gasp played dirty tricks with wills.

By the head stone stood a metal trumpet
bright with the thin music of lilies:

the living were determined to go on living.

Seen from a distance, my grandfather's cemetery on the hill,
with its trees
trembling with uncaring, garrulous birds, has the same
kind of truth
as the background of a painting by Brueghel:
White stones cast each a shadow on bright green velvet grass
where flowers grow from vases, or disordered grass
sweeps like obliterating rain upon a grave.
This miracle of detail
has nothing to do with our world

Of now: when the dog howls at doors
shut against more bitter tears than then.
My grandfather and the man dead in a ditch have grown
into a kingdom of damned souls who cannot cry out loud:
Living, they were silent waiting on the evening of their
death;
they were not mourned in war because there was not time
nor heart
since each night was a last night for anyone anywhere;
They died without being known or adequately loved,
leaving their sleeping sea-deep limbs, or their bones
scoured by sand.
If they could cry out, it would be for being betrayed.

Isn't there a small sound in the night,
not only wind in the dry branch, a cry
Demanding—not justice—pity,
since justice is over?

There is a smell of death
coming from gap-toothed houses and severed railway lines
where the nightingale-voiced, outraged children play,
from cellars where people try to live;
Also from far woods even
where lost and happy among leaves lovers are
in afternoons of only blue and green and themselves.

But the living are determined to go on living:

and in the valleys of spring hang the quiet explosions of
flowers.

GEOFFREY WAGNER

South Bend, Indiana

I dread that city where the fabulous clouds
that fabulous city no oceans know or wash
its dunes of time, I dread its voice, its haves
of want, its jukebox love, its crime.
Under
its starry lights, between the beams of neon signs,
a death is biding by the toothpaste ads, and death
is waiting at a turning in the stair, here like
anywhere else, cowled and in chains, flat and wet,
down by niggertown. I see its sin. I hear it there,
its ifs of my and know its night where is no
legendary night, oh fume of days, broad walks,
the waving crowds, those lights my lights down
by the railroad tracks, oh death.
(Sing hours and scattering hours)
Vagued in your sweat like a low woman throbs in
your sea of souls, the style and trend of ships,
their crew is stripped on shells, screaming
dead horns, walk the wide streets, stealing
bright shells.
(Why are we walking here?)
Fill out with sighs in icecold beer, warm rocks
caress our hands, in this music floats death
in tubes, it washes out our gums of lies,
(oh all the winners)
sail sometime pinnacedecked, flowerladen
to a peacock shore through pools of lips,
sail on to buildings bright as gold and sleek
as slugs and death-conditioned.
(Sing hours and beating hours)

The radios announce, the bars' blare, and now
I hear through curtained elegance your own pace
down hallways of your hair and sandalled colonnades
and kiss you there. The days swill by. The city reeks.
(Why are you wandering there?)

I fear your humour, wild city, I feel your energetic
pulse, I fear your air. I know you not, but yet
I know you there, that last decay, my dear dread,
and now I grudge your blood.

MORRIS WEISENTHAL

The Vagrant

Absorbed in the world's will like the salt-nourished sea
or a child at breast;
Never critical but tolerant as a cloud whose home
is its being
He suffers the bird at his mouth, the urchins clinging
to him like starfish.

Love comes to him often, like sheaves shadowed on an
evening hill
Up which he passes, sheaves which hold gratuitous fruit
without season;
At night he shelters the mouse and the cat
in the crook of his arm.

And death is his waking companion who goads
him up gladly and death
Is the poised cloud on its buoyant float
to nowhere;
And death is this bird flaming into the sun.

MARJORIE BOULTON

Via Poetae

(*for Jules Supervielle*)

I do not understand the holy presence,
the be when sense and tenses are quiescent,
natural and continual renaissance;

I move in ethic, time and place and mood
and do not understand my strangerhood
that is insistent yet that still evades.

At night the stars are mathematics high
but the still sea is full of hollow sky
and air between remembers shape of day,

moulding the darkness to a hemisphere
until I dive with my crustacean gear
to move in heavy fluid atmosphere

where among bones, pearls, worms and madrepores,
my path, adust with phosphorescent spores
is avenued with lamps and metaphors,

tentacled jellied lanterns of the deep
where coiled the archetypal serpents sleep
on broken yardarm and the hangman's rope.

There where my father lies among the coral
and lavers wreathe him with aquatic laurel,
conches and cowries join in ritual carol,

there where the myths are stored in tufts of lime
and octopods spin skeins from brittle foam,
where shelving rocks ripen the fruits of time,

I move upon my long uncharted journey,
dragging my hull of ribs with awkward steering,
with inextinguishable stokehole burning.

I feel the sliding ooze in evening fields
and rain in streets is shaken oceanfolds
because I walk through intersecting worlds,

because the unknown god, the inward burning,
transmutes to rite and image my externals,
ambiguous life of mortal and eternal.

The Numen in inevitable withinness
coils in my helpless and profound unwisdom
recessed from definition or petition.

Though I believe in paradox of blessing,
Numen and self as an identical essence,
I do not understand the holy presence.

JAMES BRAMWELL

Daphne to Appollo

You torture me and I do not understand.
O touch me, touch me, your finger-tips were flame
Of the sun that was in your breast, a single heart.
Touch me again with the red youth of the earth
For I am a tree and have no lips,
Have lived through many false electric Springs
That were lightnings forking through my fibre
From hell to heaven—I do not know these places.
Steeped in summer my green leaves are but symptoms
Of an impossible passion . . . O Apollo
Consume me with the flame you were
For—don't you know it?—I was always fuel
To be cut and burned upon your hearth
And leap with ecstacy in a space of darkness . . .

Quickly, save me, you who were my lover
Before the caterpillars fret my leaves to ribbons
And the terrible bird-song, season after season,
Rises through me bubbling from my branches
In a voice not mine, Apollo, in a voice not mine . . .

EDWIN BROCK

Status Quo

(*for* PADDY)

I

It is blame I fear more
Than scorn or broken fingers
Dull eyes surround my sadness
as the garish lights of another singing city
See in my ship that sailed for home
And I aboard searching for myself.

Mine is the welcome of the long bell
Tolling, the tale told quietly and alone
The traveller arriving from a windless past
Tired and out of time.

I grew in graveyards with a blossom
Brighter than argument, fed
With the friendly function of the worm
Or sat in seas where the sun
Was filtered through the waves
Of my spilt blood.

I have forgoten
Where I built, with brutal force, my city,
Carried the past in my hand
And dared the day to die before
My will was done. I have forgotten
Where I watched the skin rot
Off my bones laid useless
Where the morning waters run.
But I remember the delight of freedom
Of fear falling where my walls crashed.

II

It is blame I fear: the bare-laid
Bone, faith broken on a word,
My cornerstone that slid away
Before the mind's erosion.

Eyes have grown where the brands of war
Broke down my flesh; I have forgotten
The comfort of the blind, the tapping stick
Of darkness keeping time a monotone of regularity
I remember only the rattle of words in my tin
And the louder rattle . . . of peace.

NORMAN BRADY

Nightfall in Aragon

Kilometre 259

Sudden the night breaks, traveller,
And darkly streams
Up from the steep-sloped vast
Military graveyard of the vines.
See how the deep valley stiffens with oblivion!
See how the road wilts and sickens beneath
The advancing wraiths of what a moment since,
Fantastically, a dazzle was of gay rose mauve and green.
See how on inmost cleft, then outer,
There falls from the ghastly regiment
As snow soundless the blight of night;
While one by one the outposts of the day
Trembling darken, wiped like a blackboard
Clean of the last chalked digits of the sun,
And whatever was shape, conformity, becomes
Shameless and nameless.

As for you, traveller, here high in the sierra of Aragon,
You have left your Saragossa, you
Will not return. In you
Stark is its petrifaction. You
May see how it is yielding (though yielding as you
Cannot, stranger, who know too much)
Itself in love-preyed languor ot the night.
So may it do, and does. However, you
Abandon all you are must decorously
As all things desiccated must;
And here high in the sierra of Aragon
Finding no hostel you, sir, must
Continue. Oh my friend, my life-sick traveller,
The neon signs back there are bright in Saragossa
And talk and wine flow in alleyway taverns.
But where you go, my own sad heart,
Is down to the vale of desperate loneliness,
Ever darker down in the valley of the wraiths,
There to lie asleep beneath the mighty army
Whose only carnage is of love and hope.

J. C. GRANT

Moonlit Memorandum

Are you afraid when the night comes because
Because you are afraid of thinking and sleeping too long
You know how long?

Vineries under ice, the veins ripen,
And the child unconsciously weaving its purple shroud
Rolls its blue buds of stone into deep drowned eyes;
For to us who have travelled too far to be sure, to be sane
Madness is so blue at the bottom of the well.

Remain without the definition of the forbidden,
Withdrawing earthward, inward, where the soil is censor
Of the flower and the future, the seed already interred,
Multiplying death, the self-invigilator,
Whose eyes are our eyes ere our germ has stirred.

Seven may secrete all but the eighth chime;
Do not listen for that chime too loud, too long,
In the perilous brain: purpose and future are phrases,
Unfinished epitaphs, there is no finish, only phrases,
That backward and forward reveal no meaning,
Only the prearranged order of the same.

Plugging his deep black borings with binoculars, the corpse
Discovers the deathland of our day unaltered,
As it is to us now, so to his rottenness the same,
Life and time the language of death's procreating spasm,
Death conceiving death, expanding
Germ into mass, heaping and compressing
Darkness upon darkness, centrally, sustenance of universes.

And stencilling with bones the purple mazurka of the wind,
The corpse needs no red fungoid fern in the dark
Scabbard of his skull to poke his pungent humour
At thawing flesh and budded sticks of spring
Drumming our funeral march; we know so well
How well he sleeps, how perilously balanced the brain
Between our two conditions, the power being ours
To join his static immortality each night alone,
Lying in dread of thinking and sleeping too long,
You know how long.

CHARLES TOMLINSON

Poem

Out of the spiralled conch-shell
Spill: acorns, over the sleeping thigh;
Over the sleeping thigh: fall
Dreams of crossing oaks.

The wave that knows no breakwater
Washes the land with summer,
The grape rounds to perfection: as
The tide knocks from within.

Wave from the aestival sea
Washes the sleeping thigh,
Crossing oaks loll in the tide,
Acorns cover the sleeping bride.

Acorns cover the sleeping thigh,
Acorns move in a moving tide
Out of the mouth of the dreaming conch-shell,
Barring the washed land with oaks.

JOAN BRIDGES

St. Teresa of Avila

Here was no innocent girl with open hands
Running in the scented light between the houses
Freckled with heat to the cloisters. Here was rather
A woman twisted and driven, conscious of darkness
And deep aversion, hating the pools of silence
Beneath the choirs' sweet voices, the empty hollow
Of mind through which the wind blew from the sierras.

Here, in this skull, the long dry slopes of the plains
Parched under the sun and wind, disturbed and eroded
By these gusts of pain found being, here in the unreposing
Dry and tormented brain, the history of a nation
And of a faith were repeated, and here was absolved
At the last by knowledge that which has no forgiveness
Except by the cleansing storm in the empty vessel.

Intelligent symbol, strong as the rock and water
Gushing in showers and rivulets, sparkling down through
the gardens,
She moves in the mind with cool efficiency, even
To be a little disliked, as those who drive and are driven
And are single in purpose, for whom there is no division,
Springing from the fountain and curving through the
stone basins
To return at the last twist, clear and fresh, to the source.

DAVID WRIGHT

To JOHN HEATH-STUBBS

My half-blind friend, whom solitary as a crane I first saw
awkwardly run
On pavements out of his element, as if behind his skyscraper back
there shone

Glances of Eumenides invisible to everyone but to him; whom I
have seen take
Real flight on wings that in the sky seem easy and slack,

I dedicate to him, to this his quarrel and continual love
Of liberty and verse, this verse: to testify of

The gifts he has kept from a bag of money. May his Muse to him
Bend, bend to her lover reading the leaves in a forest of autumn,
Where, overhead, migratory birds are flying, singing, flying and
singing.

GILBERT PHELPS

The Lesson

Suddenly, we think, we learn,
and in this moment of our revelation
love's panoramas slope and turn
from the eye, with the stately declination
of that tall ambassador—exit pride;
slow motion lifting up the roots,
close-up the old animal, king, eyes fierce and wide,
slips through the branches, and subsiding shoots
a last indignant gleam: sharp tinfoil
leaves stop up that hole,
clay tightening up, and hair and hide recoil,
snap bones, sift flesh—to furnish coal!
Our trucked up hopes now lumber to the top,
consume the stubble, spread the richer crop.

PITY AND THE FIXED STARS: AN APPROACH TO VERNON WATKINS

I undertake with some hesitation to write on Mr. Watkins' work. I have been constant in my admiration for it, ever since I first came across it in 1941. But I am by no means confident that I have the clue to its intentions, nor, indeed, to any sort of understanding of many of Mr. Watkins' individual poems. I am, furthermore, without the privilege of personal acquaintance with him. Did I possess it, I should perhaps be even more conscious of my present temerity, in attempting an estimate of a poet who is not only my senior by a decade or more, but who also, it is plain, approaches his craft with a single-heartedness and integrity which few of us, these days, can lay claim to.

Some of Mr. Watkins' poems appeared in *The White Horseman* (1941) the second of the anthologies issued by the group who called themselves 'the New Apocalypse'. But even then one might have been inclined to enquire what exactly he was doing in that gallery. From the mass of critical verbiage with which the 'Apocalyptics' sought to define their position, it is no more possible, nine years later, for the wit of man to recover a coherent meaning than to reconstruct the song of the Sirens. (But malice may prompt one to return, with quiet amusement, to such passages as that in which Mr. Robert Melville instituted a comparison between a poem of Mr. Treece and El Greco's *Agony in the Garden,* or where Mr. Fraser affirmed that he found Mr. Nicholas Moore's mind more interesting than that of Blake.) But one may suspect that, in the end, it all boiled down to this: a general discontent with the social-objective way of writing which prevailed in the 'thirties, *plus* some rather vague ideas about the importance of 'mythical' imagery. Into this framework were fitted the rhetoric of Mr. Hendry, the naïve romanticism of Mr. Treece, and the marginal comments of Mr. Fraser and Mr. Moore (two somewhat tender-minded intellectuals with a taste for the easier forms of English versification); and, apparently, the finely-wrought, hieratic, and formal verse of the poet who forms the subject of this essay.

Mr. Watkins was considerably older than these young poets whose debut he shared. Indeed, he is, I believe, the senior of Mr. Auden also. But, as the publishers' blurb on the dust-jacket of his latest book, *The Lady with the Unicorn,* tells us, 'he is a stern critic of his own work, more inclined to revise or to discard than

to publish'. He is one of those who is content to stand apart from the literary hurly-burly of the metropolis, quietly pursuing a prosaic worldly vocation in his native Wales, and at the same time slowly but carefully cultivating his poetic gift. He stands aside, also, from what has been the dominant tendency of modern poetry since Mr. Eliot—the tendency to bring its language close to that of the market-place, in diction, imagery, and subject-matter. In all these things, Mr. Watkins has achieved the difficult feat of preserving a traditionally poetic manner, which is, at the same time, never stilted, nor, in the bad sense, artificial or conventional. His verse is always formal, and, in general, carefully rhymed. His imagery is often emblematic, as in the title-poem of *The Lady with the Unicorn,* in the manner of Dante and other mediæval poets.

This approach to his art places Mr. Watkins in the tradition of Yeats, rather than in that of Mr. Eliot. The impress of Yeats' manner of utterance, and of his versification, is, indeed, very strong on Mr. Watkins' earlier work: so much so, that, for a time, I was inclined to doubt whether he would be able to emancipate himself from it sufficiently to express, in its totality, his own characteristic vision. But though Mr. Watkins is still inclined to lean rather heavily upon precedent, in his latest volume we are conscious of other influences at work. *Driftwood,* the third of his *Four Sonnets of Resurrection,* immediately suggests Hopkins' *That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire . . .*, on the same subject. *The Song of the Good Samaritan* recalls the manner of Charles Williams—another poet who, like Yeats, stood out, in his day, for the preservation of a certain ceremoniousness in the language of modern poetry. Mr. Watkins has also experimented in classical metres—the hexameter in *Swallows over the Weser,* the Sapphic stanza in *Ophelia.* We may guess that he has been influenced in this less by the Greek and Latin classics, than by the practice of such German poets as Hoelderlin, of whom he has done some excellent translations.

For Mr. Watkins, the drama of human existence is played out against the backcloth of archetypal, mythical images. It was this, if anything, which justified his being linked with the Apocalyptics. *After Sunset,* in the *Ballad of the Mari Lwyd* volume, interprets the history of the human imagination as an Odyssean voyage among these images. The myths of Greece give way to those of the North; then, in the *Age of Reason,* we find:

The myth in exile,
Killed by the starry wheel.

Then follows the sunset-splendour of Romanticism:

Dusk! Grief of the Gods!
Titans the mind imagined
In awful synods.
Gold lightning in the wind

Supernatural wrath.
The far-blown clarion,
Accurst Harisuth,
The downfall of Hyperion.

And far beyond
The saga-laden sea,
Visionless diamond,
The sandgrains of infancy.

But now these also have faded, and the poem concludes with the cry:

O life, my mistress,
This moment reclaims you
From the proud figured dress
Of time's imagery.

This scheme somewhat suggests Yeats' *Phases of the Moon,* and the cyclic theory of history envisaged in that poet's later work. We are also reminded of the conflict of images in Yeats' *Byzantium* poems, and his *Dialogue of Self and Soul.* In these poems of Yeats there are, on the one hand, the tower, the stars, the starlit dome, the artifice of eternity, and, on the other, the frog-spawn of a blind man's ditch, the mire and turmoil of the dolphin's blood. The ideal and the natural worlds are set in opposition, the poet choosing now one, and now the other. But, for Mr. Watkins, the claims of natural images are less violently in opposition to the ideas of eternity. He is interested, as Yeats was not, in animals, birds, and plants for their own sake, and ordinary human beings present to him their natural demand for sympathy. The speaker in *The Collier* is the youthful survivor of a pit-disaster. But his sufferings are symbolicaly connected with those of Joseph in the Old Testament story—the innocent victim of his brother's envy:

They dipped my coat in the blood of a kid
And they cast me down a pit,
And although I crossed with strangers
There is no way up from.

By this Biblical reference, the two worlds—that of the images of myth, and the every-day world with its human suffering—are brought into relation one with another, and made one.

The *Ballad of the Mari Lwyd* itself is one of the most remarkable long poems of this century. It is based on a wide-spread folk ritual, connected with the Winter Solstice, and with the ceremonies of the Dead, with which the poet himself was familiar in his childhood in Wales. The revellers who carry their horse's head from house to house challenging those within to a rhyming contest on the last night of the year, represent the spirits of the Dead, and of Winter. But the poet makes them also represent what is outcast, and morally rejected, whether by the individual or by society as a whole. The rhyming contest in which those within the house (ourselves, in our warm, brightly-lit world of consciousness), and the Dead without, contend, becomes a symbol of poetry itself, and of its function as communication, even on the extreme frontiers of being. In his own note on the poem, Mr. Watkins says: 'I have attempted to bring together those who are separated. The last breath of the year is their threshold, the moment of supreme forgiveness, confusion and understanding, the profane and sacred moment impossible to realise while the clock-hands divide the Living from the Dead'.

By this moment, which is both in Time and timeless, we pass outside that circle of lunar phases in which Yeats moved (and seemed content to move). The apprehension of it links Mr. Watkins to some other modern poets, to whom he is akin in his Christianity. For this moment is that which lies at the heart of the *Four Quartets*. It corresponds to the moment of 'midwinter spring' in *Little Gidding*, in which the poet is brought face to face with his own dead past, and in which the conflicting and defeated contestants of History—the broken king, and the other poet who died blind and quiet—are reconciled, and through forgiveness redeemed from the purgatory of Time. The bringing together of the two worlds of the Living and the Dead is also a theme which preoccupied Charles Williams (see especially his poem, *Taliessin at Lancelot's Mass*, and his prose stories *Descent into Hell* and *All Hallows' Eve*).

Mr. Watkins' second book, *The Lamp and the Veil,* consists of three long poems. They seem to me to be much less successful than either the poems which precede or those which have followed them. *Yeats in Dublin* records a visit to Yeats shortly before his death, and that poet's conversation with the author. It suffers from a too obvious affectation of Yeats' own bare, monumental magniloquence. Though its subject-matter is interesting, one is tempted to think that it might have been expressed, at least equally well, in prose. Doubtless it was the author's intention, by his art, to lift a prosaic, autobiographical incident into the realm of personal myth. *Sea Music for my Sister Travelling,* on the other hand, suffers from a too complete immersion in the dolphin's mire and blood. Here Mr. Watkins, who is capable of an intense, even epigrammatic compression, writes a long diffuse poem, which partakes of the elemental, obsessive, subliminal imagery characteristic of his friend and fellow Welshman Mr. Dylan Thomas and his imitators. It does not seem to me that, by his imaginative conviction, Mr. Watkins is able to make this material take on a coherent poetic life of its own—as Mr. Thomas, who is native to this element, does.

In his third book, *The Lady with the Unicorn,* the essential formality of Mr. Watkins' poetry is once more affirmed, and indeed accentuated. The poems included in this book are essentially traditional and classical in style, freed from any trace of the fashionable rhetorics of the age. At the same time, there are signs of a greater variety and freedom than in the earlier volumes. There are some extremely beautiful Nature-poems, and some on personal themes; others are more purely metaphysical in their temper. Perhaps the most interesting are those founded on episodes from the Gospels, in which the mythical image, and the particular human situation are, once again, brought into relation one with another. Thus, in *Zacchæus in the Leaves,* the sycamore up which Zacchæus climbed in order to observe Christ preaching is equated with the Tree of Life—the World Tree of all mythologies. In *The Healing of the Leper* the primacy of the moment of direct human experience over any abstract pattern is affirmed:—

> *Plotinus, preaching on heaven's floor,*
> *Could not give praise like that loud cry*
> *Bursting the bondage of death's door;*
> *For we die once; indeed we die.*

A kindred idea is more fully developed in *The Song of the Good Samaritan*. The poet announces his theme thus:

> *I sing of the Good Samaritan, of*
> *Pity and the Fixed Stars.*

The Fixed Stars symbolize, as often in poetry, man's apparently immutable destiny. They are also, in the fabulous animal forms of their constellations the mythological archetypes. The destiny which they have allotted the Samaritan would seem to be that of the eternal outcast. But along with this, they have flung down to him the moment of choice, wherein, by the act of self-sacrifice in which he helps the abandoned traveller, he is able to find his own freedom. The mythologies thus ultimately bring about their own defeat:

> *He broke the classical falsehood, summoned awake*
> *A world from dust with the secret worlds of his tears,*
> *Shut in those heavens he heard the mythologies shake.*
>
> * * *
>
> *"Out of the dust I raised this image of love.*
> *Moment of darkness, moment, still you are mine,*
> *Though the proud-winged, galloping horses disdainfully move*
>
> *From the wounded god, the arena of dust and sand.'*

In such a poem as this, magnificent in the clarity of its imagery, and its assured rhythmical sweep, Mr. Watkins shows himself to be among the major poets of our time.

JOHN HEATH-STUBBS

Introduction to the Study of Literature, Vol. I: Poetry, by LIONEL ELVIN (Sylvan Press, 10s. 6d. net). *Yeats: The Man and the Masks, by* RICHARD ELLMAN (Macmillan, 21s. net). *The Art of T. S. Eliot,* by HELEN GARDNER (Cresset Press, 15s. net).

MR. Elvin has produced in the first of his three projected volumes—the others are to be on the Novel and on Drama—one of the most valuable and discerning works grounded on the Cambridge school of Practical Criticism that we have yet encountered. Its radical difference from the generality of such 'Introductions' is in its close critical analysis of short passages of verse or short complete poems rather than of easy generalizations about 'schools', 'tendencies', and 'influences', or genial gossip about the intimate details of a writer's life. Biography and environment as well as a writer's religious and moral beliefs have their place in literary studies; but they must be strictly subsidiary to the main design: a consideration of the work; and there are cogent sections in this book both on their revelance and subordination. In a word, this volume gets to direct grips with the essentials of its subject: it is a genuine introduction to the study of Literature and not to the study of the history of literature, or 'Eng. Lit.'

When it is called an Introduction the word must be understood as applying primarily to adult students. As an ex-W.E.A. tutor and as the present Principal of Ruskin College for wroking men and women, it is such a student body that Mr. Elvin primarily envisages. His work presupposes little or no previous knowledge of the subject, but it does suppose a certain maturity of judgment and experience of living that puts this book outside the scope of schools except for a few students working for Higher Schools or Public Entrance. But no adult with a certain amount of 'literary background' need be deterred by the apparently elementary nature of the critical processes of this book. They *are* elementary; but unless he is one of the fortunate few he is unlikely to have approached his literature in this direct and stimulating way before, and the elements are what he, too, needs. Whether then as Introduction or re-introduction, I repeat: this is an extremely valuable book.

To Mr. Elvin 'Literary criticism is not . . . a corpus of knowledge to be mastered. It is rather a technique to be learned'. And the technique consists, basically, in a study of literature reduced to its elements, words. That does not mean merely a

study of individual words (and it has no philological reference), but of words in their context. He is concerned with their qualities in the phrase as visual and auditory images; their symbolic overtones and power of association and suggestion; their organization—since this volume deals exclusively with poetry—within the metrical form chosen; a discovery of the author's purpose in their use, and a consideration of their fitness in implementing it. To that end Mr. Elvin selects short passages for analysis and evaluation from Milton, Wordsworth, and Eliot as examples of the 'artificial', the 'natural', and the 'impressionistic' styles in verse. A long chapter containing further short extracts is then devoted to each of the three, and it is astonishing how much can be learned about a poet, what telling comparisons can be evoked with his fellow-writers, and what differences appreciated, once we are prepared to forget our literary prejudices and preconceptions and surrender ourselves completely to a few short texts.

Up to this point in the book comparisons, illuminating and varied, have been but incidental to the study of each major figure. Now, however, follows a chapter entitled 'Three Further Passages and Three Problems in Criticism' in which the comparative method predominates in an analysis of three passages dealing with physical or metaphorical blindness: the famous opening of Bk. III of *Paradise Lost*, some stanzas from the *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality*, and the sixth part of *Ash Wednesday*.

The problems that arise out of this comparison have been already mentioned. They are, first, the revelance of biographical data to critical appreciation and the obvious danger of swamping the text in 'literary history'. Secondly, there is the question of the relationship between a poet's writings and his beliefs, and the question arising therefrom: 'how far ought our response to a work to be modified by the fact that we . . . sympathize or fail to sympathize with, the opinions and views of the writer?' And thirdly, there is the 'Difficulty of Poetry'—mainly of contemporary poetry. A good deal of the chapters on Eliot have treated of this problem in a most illuminating manner; and here the main sources of difficulty are seen in the need of most contemporary poets not only to create symbols but to create a personal myth of existence to which these symbols refer. Yeats is an excellent example, and his *Byzantium* is carefully analysed —even though Mr. Elvin does not find quite the same crystals in the crucible as the present reviewer. The book concludes with

a section that might with advantage have been longer—it is only four pages—on 'Criciticsm and Taste'.

A critical work that left no disagreements would be insipid, and though I have my own reservations about some of the *Cantos*, I think Mr. Elvin seriously underestimates Ezra Pound as a poet; and that by stressing a priest/poet conflict in Hopkins—which I should have thought W. H. Gardner if no other had successfully scotched—he seems to me to be misunderstanding the real nature of Hopkins's work. But these things do not matter, for these poets receive only incidental treatment; nor would they even if they were more central to his thesis. It is the method of approach to a poem, and the general illumination of poetry that the method secures, which are the outstanding qualities of this book. Only two things are lacking: every critical work, even when the main poets dealt with are so few, should have an index; and more careful proof correction would have avoided a fair number of misprints, such as 'is' for 'in' (p.97) or 'was' for 'has' (p.128). And surely Wordsworth wrote 'moving about in worlds not realized', not 'half-realized'?

Mr. Ellman's is the most closely integrated account of Yeats we have yet had. It analyzes the poet's outward activities and inner experiences, and his many attempts at resolution of the conflict between them. More fully than any previous work—though Louis MacNeice had emphasized this in 1941[1]—it goes into Yeats's doctrines of 'the tragic pose', 'the mask', and 'the antithetical self', and the final attempt to reconcile the opposites, self and anti-self, the man and his masks, in the mystical quest for Unity of Being.

Coming so soon after Norman Jeffares' book, *W. B. Yeats: Man and Poet*,[2] some comparison is inevitable. Neither book is completely satisfactory on the poems themselves. Jeffares makes no attempt to assess their literary qualities; he is concerned with the personal and autobiographical element in them, but he does give a very liberal number of quotations reflecting Yeats's changing mood and vision step by step through his life, and all the references are carefully decumented. Mr. Ellman quotes much less freely but he does analyze in some detail a few of the more significant poems of Yeats's later years. Nevertheless there is much more that is important about *Sailing to Byzantium*—his

[1] *The Poetry of W. B. Yeats* (O.U.P)
[2] Routledge Kegan Paul

fellow-American Stauffer has said some of it[3]—and nowhere in either Jeffares or Ellman is there an adequate evaluation of Yeats's poetic evolution from romantic floridity to the bare sinuousity of his last phase; very little consideration of his changing rhythms, imagery, word-order, or diction—in short, very little *poetic* criticism. Yet although both books are avowedly biography and not criticism, of a man like Yeats in whom incomparably the most important activity was the writing of poetry and poetic drama, no adequate picture will be painted until the gradual development of his poetic genius receives more searching treatment. (One thinks how Mr. Elvin would have tackled it had he essayed to write on 'Yeats: the poetry of symbolism'.)

Yet though that task remains to be done we must be grateful for what we have received. Both these authors had access to hitherto unpublished material—Mr. Ellman mentions 50,000 pages of Yeats MSS!—and both made good use of it. As suggested at the outset of this review, Mr. Ellman has the more closely integrated his researches; Jeffares gives us many more incidental flashes, often very illuminating and felicitous, but Mr. Ellman does succeed in making a coherent picture of the life and work and inner conflicts of that many-sided genius, W. B. Yeats. Sometimes we have the impression of an over-simplification in the interests of this coherence; and elsewhere we feel the narrative a little needlessly overburdened. Doubtless it was an advantage to be told a little more fully about Madam Blavatsky and her Theosophists; but was the history of contemporary European occultism (in Chapter IV) a necessary interlude? Perhaps. For, be that as it may, what emerges from this book as the most important clue to an understanding of Yeats and his work, is the immense part played by the spirit world in the moulding of his thought and the character of his writings.

We all know the fairy tales and folk lore of *The Celtic Twilight* to which we assumed Yeats gave a dubious assent; and we have known of his dabblings in Theosophy and of the fabrication of *A Vision*. But all his life Yeats sought help, in one form or other, from another world than this--seeking, as the psychologists would affirm, a compensation for his maladjustments and his failures in self-assurance and self-fulfilment—particularly in his frustrated love of Maude Gonne, but also in many of his day-to-day activities. But what was at first explored as a

[3]In *The Nature of Poetry* (Norton)

refuge was later made to pay tribute in service to his art. Passing from Theosophy to his Order of the Golden Dawn and thence to spiritualism, he finally found, or believed he had found, the revelation which would unify his life and his art in the automatic writings of his wife—writings he was later careful to amplify with his reading of systematic philosophy especially in Plato and Plotinus, Berkeley and Hegel. From these automatic writings was born *A Vision;* and from *A Vision* he went on to his final exploration of the *Upanishads* and the wisdom of the East.

A Vision is a most potent reminder that it is not the objective validity of a writer's beliefs that matter for his art, but what he makes of them. Whatever we may think of the amalgam of beliefs of which it is the summation—or even whether, or in what precise way, Yeats 'believed' in it himself—he triumphantly justified its composition in the production of his splendid later verse; in such poems as *Sailing to Byzantium, Among School Children* and, perhaps finest of all, *The Second Coming.* To a full appreciation of such poems some acquaintance with *A Vision* is essential. Yet, even if we know nothing of its esoteric symbols, because the coherence of its framework has served to integrate his thought and imagery, we recognize at once in poems such as these the authentic hall-mark of poetic genius. Mr. Ellman's is just the kind of book to whet our appetite for a re-reading of the *Collected Poems* and the *Collected Plays,* both long out of print but promised, in their definitive form, from the same publishers in the spring.

With both Yeats and Eliot we are unquestionably in the realm of major poetry; but, wrote Mr. Eliot in 'Religion and Literature': 'The "greatness" of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards; though we must remember that whether it is literature or not can be determined only by literary standards. And because it is as great literature that Miss Helen Gardner seeks to evaluate his poetic and dramatic work, she wisely avails herself of other standards of ultimate assessment; but not until she has firmly stressed its purely technical and aesthetic qualities. In the first chapter, for instance, her analysis of Eliot's various metres is masterly, and her long footnote on pp. 16-17 on the English 'heroic 'line challenging and significant in a far wider orbit than this book. Yet with all her care at establishing Eliot's technical sufficiency, it is with a higher sphere, where moral and theological, poetic and aesthetic standards blend in a satisfy-

ing apprehension of the nature of reality, that her book is fundamentally concerned; with the varying degrees in which, in different phases of his work, the poet has succeeded in rendering his personal mystique available to increasingly wider audiences. Because she finds this universality both of values and the symbolism of their conveyance most marked in *Four Quartets* —the book which she assumes, perhaps a little too unquestioningly, to have enlarged the circle of Mr. Eliot's readers more than any other—she both begins and ends with a careful consideration of it. Those who have read her previous studies of it in *New Writing* and in Rajan's symposium, *T. S. Eliot: A Study of his Writings by Several Hands,* will need no telling of the critical sensitivity and spiritual richness of her explorations which new readers will here find.

This casual reference of mine to her writings elsewhere on Eliot is an interesting sidelight on the book's method and approach. It is not a book for the beginner in Eliot criticism. Professor Matthiessen, F. R. Leavis, or (on *The Waste Land*) Professor Cleanth Brooks are more helpful introductions. But for those who have come to feel the power and attraction of Eliot's work for themselves, I know of no more sensitive a guide to its hidden and at times unsuspected depths, nor one better calculated to widen the critical and spiritual horizons of her readers, than Miss Gardner.

It is not quite fair to say, as the jacket does, that 'she takes over from where Matthiessen left off', for that is to ignore the second edition of *The Achievement of T. S. Eliot* issued this year, in which *Four Quartets* and the dramas do now receive treatment. The two approaches, however, are quite different; and on the dramas, especially on *The Family Reunion,* her approach is the first to be critically sufficient—even though she fails fully to appreciate the power of sheer *dramatic* construction in that play.

Eliot has gone to some ingenious lengths in his study of Dante to prove that we need not be in personal, but only in imaginative, sympathy with a writer's major beliefs and standards in order fully to appreciate his work. But he would probably not deny that there is an inner core (though not necessarily a 'literary' one) that remains inaccessible to all who cannot identify themselves with the writer's main ethical and theological premisses. And here is one of the reasons why Miss Gardner's work has especial depth and value. Her understanding of the preconcep-

tions of Catholic Christianity, and of the problems and illuminations of the great mystics on whose writings Eliot increasingly draws, gives an authoritative note to her interpretations that nothing else perhaps—at least for one class of Eliot reader—can supply. And her second qualification for interpreting so careful a verbal artist as Eliot lies in the clarity and polished felicity of her own prose style. This, and the ease with which she passes to and fro from poem to poem, give a certain elusive quality to her criticism; and this again militates against its effectiveness for the beginner; but for those to whom the poetry is already familiar ground her method and style afford both charm and illumination. That method is to focus attention upon some aspect of technique, content, or mood of apprehension, and to trace it in its progressive development through the work from *Prufrock* to *Four Quartets*.

Yet, like Mr. Elvin, Miss Gardner realizes that in the last analysis it is the poet's special power of language, a special feeling for the connections of words in sound and meaning, that determines his stature. And it is in Eliot's use of words, and in his concern with them—explicitly, in three out of the four Quartets—that she sees the measure of his genius.

HERMANN PESCHMANN

WILLIAM LANGLAND OF LONDON

Visions from Piers Ploughman. Taken from the poem of William Langland and translated into Modern English by NEVILL COGHILL (Phoenix House, 12s. 6d.).

WHILE Chaucer is part of the common reading of all interested in English poetry, his contemporary Langland suffers either by not being read at all or by dismissal as an essential but difficult and tricky item on the syllabus of English schools at the Universities.

Nevill Coghill in issuing the present volume has endeavoured to put him into a more popular dress by making frequent cuts among the merely theological passages and by translating the remainder into a modern English closely allied to the original.

Among those unfamiliar with Langland this new version should be read by practicing poets if by no one else. In the first place Langland retains some of the majesty of the earlier Anglo-Saxon or Old English poetry—and this has rarely been equalled in the centuries of Middle and Modern English that have followed and not at all in the present day except perhaps by poets like T. S. Eliot and Edith Sitwell; secondly Langland has a rich humanity absent from most of present-day verse; thirdly he wrote with naturalness and usually with clarity.

Little is known about Langland's life and what there is is told by Mr. Coghill. Like many another poet he was fit for nothing except writing poetry. Long-limbed and weak-backed he left Malvern a 'moneyless' acolyte to scrounge his way through life in London, earning what living he could by saying prayers for rich people for money. As he confesses candidly in one autobiographical passage:

I live in London and on London too.

The writing of *Piers Ploughman* occupied most of his lifetime. In it he set out to solve the true purpose of our existence on earth and this is answered early in the poem by Holy Church. The end of life is Truth which is Love which are God. The remaining content of the poem serves to illustrate this theme that Man made in God's image should live for Him in Truth and in Love, in

whatever station of life he should be called, either as Do Well the man, Do Better the Priest, or Do Best the Bishop. The various visions as they occur all amplify details in the embroidery of the poet's theme, culminating—after the Harrowing of Hell—with the Founding of the Holy Church, the Attack upon it, and the Coming of Anti-Christ.

Langland—whatever his fleshly faults may have been—was deeply religious, but in the way of a common man. He could argue theologically if he wished, but he lacked what I would call religious aesthetics. This and the intrigue of the church either appalled him or passed him by, which perhaps explains why he did not enjoy a great name in his own lifetime, as Chaucer did, but why also his characters were familiar long after his death in tradition and upon the common tongue. Langland would never have made a Bishop, nor could he have preached a sermon from a fashionable pulpit. He was too plebeian.

His greatness therefore belongs to literature. Yet he was not the master of the alliterative line for which he is celebrated, for the form he uses is usually a bastard version half remembered from the great Anglo-Saxon poems that preceded him. He uses this line as carelessly as it was possibly subconsciously and he often slips out of it. Most frequently too his metres defy scansion.

It is accordingly his total effect that is striking or else the sharp detail of descriptive or occasional passages. There is the wonderful drinking scene in the *Vision of the Seven Deadly Sins* with Glutton's guts grumbling like two greedy sows till he coughs up a caudle over Clement's clothing, or else in a description of the Crucifixion.

> 'Crucifige!' *cried a Corporal, 'I warrant he's a wizard!'*
> 'Tolle, tolle!' *said another, and took some keen thorns,*
> *And began of keen thorn to make him a garland . . .*

On death too he sounds a strong note without the use of artifice. As when Piers warns the Knight:

> *For in the charnel churchyard a chur is hard to know,*
> *Or a knight from a knave there; know this in your heart.*

Or later, before the coming of Anti-Christ:

Old Age the hoary one hacked in the vanguard
And bore the banner before Death, as befitted.
And Nature came next with noxious diseases,
Poxes and pestilence, pasting the peoples
And rallying Corruption in ruin on the rout.
Death came driving after, dashing all to dust,
Kings and commanders, kaisers and popes;
Learned and illiterate, none were left standing,
Of those that he struck, none stirred again.
Many a lovely lady and light-hearted lover
Swooned and sickened in sorrow, at the dint of Death.

And Christ, at the Harrowing of Hell, breaks into the infernal regions with the phrase:

Dukes of this dim place, at once undo your gates . . .

Langland, as these quotations show, belongs entire to the mediæval world. Like Chaucer in *The Canterbury Tales* he brings back a May morning from the beginning of history; and his characters, though often immoral, are human beings lost in their own dead years but embedded also, repeatedly almost, in succeeding ages. Persons like Lady Meed, Petronella Proudheart, Retail Rosy, Friar Fickle-Tongue, Ribald Robin the Rhymer, and Sir Love-to-lie-in-lechery are present and vivid in Langland in their commonest multiple. Meanwhile Piers Ploughman too moves among them, simple and honest and strong, in the human armour that Christ put on when he came to save a world naturally wicked.

And then Life laughed, and flaunted his feathers,
Hastily armed with a hauberk of harlotry,
And held Holiness a joke and Humbleness a waster
Loyalty a churl and Liar a champion.

As usual there were few to listen to Conscience. Or to Nature:

'Learn to love,' said Nature, 'and leave all other learning.'

Poets in their several ways have been saying the same thing ever since.

JOHN WALLER

Poems of John Clare's Madness. Edited by GEOFFREY GRIGSON (Routledge, 21s.).

Collected Poems by Edward Thomas, with a foreword by WALTER DE LA MARE. (Faber and Faber, 8s. 6d. net).

MR. Grigson has gathered into his book more than one hundred hitherto unprinted poems written by John Clare in the asylums in Epping Forest and Northampton, in addition to others that have appeared before. It was the opinion of Dr. Allen, who kept the Epping hospital, that Clare's madness was largely the result of his poverty and worry. At times he was almost normal, but at others he suffered from delusions, one of the most persistent being that he was Byron, whose funeral procession he had once seen in Oxford Street.

Some people who visited him in Epping found him hoeing thistles, his pipe in his mouth. They talked about Byron and about *Childe Harold,* and although Clare's mind slipped into the delusion that he was a prizefighter, he returned to the conversation and his visitors were struck by his fluent language, his great candour and 'the perfect good taste' of his remarks on Byron.

Some of the poems reveal the sadness and despair he felt, as, for instance, this one, entitled *A Thought*:

A night without morning,
A trouble without end,
A life of bitter scorning,
A world without a friend.

Even the poems written at the times when his mind was very deranged have an interesting vigour—and humour—in them, as for instance, where he wrote: Bricklayers want lime, as I want rhymes for fill-ups,—So here's a health to sweet Eliza Phillips'.

Don Juan, A Poem written by Clare in the belief that he was Byron, reminds me strongly of Skelton. Here is an example from Clare:

Whigs strum fiddle strings until they snap
With cuckoo, cuckold, cuckoo year by year.
The razor plays it on the barber's strap

—The scissors-grinder thinks it rather queer
That labour won't afford him 'one wee drap'
Of ale or gin or half and half or beer
—I wish Prince Albert, and the noble dastards
Who wed the wives, would get the noble bastards.

—and here is one from Skelton:

So many cuckold-makers, So many crackers,
And So many peace-breakers, Saw I never.
So much vain clothing, With cutting and jagging,
And so much bragging, Saw I never.

In *Don Juan* particularly there is the same violent, headlong rushing strength so typical of Skelton.

This collection should do much to establish Clare in his true place as a poet and not, as he has so persistently and wrongly been described, as a 'peasant-poet'. His work, including much if not most of that written whilst he was insane, will stand up to any criticism without his having to shelter behind his humble birth and lack of education. Perhaps his madness is best describec' in his lines on the elms and the ashes:

Leaving grey openings where the light looks through.
The elm tree's heavy foliage meets the eye
Propt in dark masses on the evening sky.
The lighter ash but half obstructs the view,

This poem could have been written by Edward Thomas and reading through this new impression of his poems it is thought that it comes at a moment when it seems that this writer's reputation has reached a full maturity. Perhaps the war had something to do with it, as John Lehmann wrote in an article on Thomas in *New Writing*, 'The war years led me, as I believe they led a great many other people, to read Edward Thomas's poetry with a new attention, and to discover that it was standing up to the sorting of time and new circumstances quite extraordinarily well. . . . This tragic sense (in Thomas's poetry) was bound to evoke a deep reponse in the disappointed hopes and sombre forebodings of 1939. But Thomas does not merely tell one poetically that grief always has been and will be again; he goes one step further. He is, it goes almost without saying, one of those writers who are only likely to emerge in an epoch when new

knowledge and new possibilities in life cannot be fitted into the patterns established by the old religions and the conventional, time-hallowed systems of thought.'

The search during the war for a writer whose feeling accorded with the reader's own distress and weariness of conventional and religious patterns, often led to Thomas. So, at the end of the war and in the doubting, tired years, that followed, his public was greatly increased.

This new impression contains one poem that was not included in previous ones and is particularly interesting because its subject is one rarely touched by Thomas—that of relationship. It was addressed to his father and gives an idea of the extent of Thomas's feeling of isolation and his awareness of his difference from his family. He expresses this feeling with a simplicity that is at once brutal and extremely moving:

I may come near loving you
When you are dead
And there is nothing to do
And much to be said.

But as I read through his poems again it was his familiar poems that I still like best. When midwinter is particularly black and seemingly hopeless where can one find, for simplicity and immediate feeling of spring than this:

Their petals, strewing the grass as for a wedding
The cherry trees bend over and are shedding,
On the old road where all that passed are dead,
This early May morn when there is none to wed.

And reading it again what a train of impressions and thoughts it sets in motion. And when we think about that we realise what a rare poet Edward Thomas was.

ROLAND GANT

And in the Human Heart by CONRAD AIKEN (Staples Press, 5s.).
Poems by GERALD BULLETT (Cambridge University Press, 5s.).
By Avon River by H.D. (Macmillan, 10s. 6d.).

Walter de la Mare, a Study of his Poetry, by HENRY CHARLES DUFFIN (Sidgwick and Jackson, 8s. 6d.)

IN spite of the whirling eddies and gurgles of the younger American songsters, Conrad Aiken is still the American poet who can best be relied upon to please the traditional English ear. In any case, the latter has come to ache sympathetically for smoother rhythms and quieter music than it gets from the moulting mechanical parrots of the 'thirties, and there is no real reason why Messrs. Aiken and Bullett should not now be heard. As to Hilda Doolittle, her voice, alas, is but a whisper of its former self.

Conrad Aiken's book contains forty-three sonnets, some of which have a dexterity which is up to Elizabethan standards. Note, for example, the internal rhyming and assonance of:

Time will dismiss such subject shapes as these:
the thistledown, that flicks and clocks an hour;
the clock that ticks industrious obsequies,
marking indifferent deaths of soul and flower.

Unashamedly romantic in style and choice of subject—for this is a sequence of love sonnets—the poet is often able to ring out a memorable line, e.g.

The golden spokes
whirl over heaven from the bright axletree

And if there is the occasional bathetic bump, an assured technique carries us over most of the dangers. At his worst, Mr. Aiken can be very disappointing, but this new sequence is a reminder that he is also the author of that neglected masterpiece, *John Deth.*

Mr. Bullett is quieter, gentler, and no initiator of arson upon the Thames. But he is competent, where many are not, and occasionally he can work the magic of a De la Mare. For instance a poem beginning

I met an old woman
Adrift in the rain

goes on with the haunting repetition

Honey and roses
I see in the glass,
Honey and roses
And raven hair.

Elsewhere, there is the influence of Chinese poetry, and Mr. Bullett has a countryman's eye for places where

. . . men with carts come by or lurching cows
Or shrieking children shake the willow-boughs.

But when he becomes philosophical, the verse goes blank, and he has an insensitiveness curious in a poet otherwise capable of delicate effects.

The second part of the book, when it does not likewise indulge in whimsy about Shakespeare's character, gives a potted history of Elizabethan lyrics and lyric-writers. Occasionally this proves interesting, but how the ghost of Herrick would fling his tankard to read that he 'was quite content at Dean Prior'! Similar inaccuracies crop up now and again through lush feminine prose which ends with the triumphant conclusion that Shakespeare 'had come home because he loved Judith.

I see that Horace Gregory has said that H.D.'s writings will have 'an immortality' and that this book is a book to be placed on the same shelf as Edith Sitwell's *Fanfare for Elizabeth*. Mr. Gregory is evidently not aware that the ladies live in different streets, and that Hilda Doolittle is merely one of those enthusiastic American visitors to Stratford who indulge in visions of a 'new olde worlde'. Admittedly, we are overdue for an Elizabethan revival, for the Metaphysicals have become very tedious, but when the revival is born an excellent midwife will be required and H.D. is more like the wicked fairy at a christening.

. . . the Poetry of Walter de la Mare is not essentially either a criticism of life or (as some think it) an escape from life. It will fulfil both these functions for those who require them, but the primary end of de la Mare's poetry is to heighten life.

This is Mr. Duffin's conclusion, and very sensible it is: but to reach it, we have had to come through a wilderness of words in which only a few paths have been clear of verbiage. For example, one of the chapters is headed 'The Other Worlde', which is painfully reminiscent of Olde Worlde Teashoppes, and which starts the reader off on the wrong foot immediately. Then, banging a friendly drum, Mr. Duffin says: 'Mr. de la Mare's ability to

express in marvellous verse all the marvellous things he has to say is excelled by few even of the greatest poets.

It is, therefore, not so much what the critic says as the way in which he says it which will annoy the enthusiast. It is like spreading stale honey over wild strawberries, or, to be more fair, like the schoolmaster whose very enthusiasm obscures his subject and annoys his class. Having said this, however ,it must be admitted that Mr. Duffin was attempting the impossible. Living poets are like chameleons, and although Mr. de la Mare's virtues were recognized early and he soon ceased to 'live on air, promise-crammed', the very nature and quality of his verse makes commentary redundant and misleading. Mr. Duffin nobly quotes and compares with Hardy, Wordsworth, and the Georgians, but he comes puffing after his original like Watson after Sherlock Holmes.

The truth is, of course, that Mr. de la Mare has a mind like quicksilver and a gift for words like the grace of God. For sheer delicacy and music it is surely more correct to compare him to Herrick and Ben Jonson than to the flat simplicity of Wordsworth or the bludgeoning clarity of Hardy. In referring to Drayton, Mr. Duffin comes nearer the case, and his chapter on de la Mare's daring mixture of beauty and humour must win respect, but he has failed to give the magnificent (Self-) *Portrait* its due.

Nothing has become Walter de la Mare so much as his later poems. As a man, he has always been admired, loved and respected by a myriad of friends and acquaintances whose effusiveness must often have been a secret embarassment to him, but until *The Burning Glass* there was always the danger that the poet would be mistaken for a children's writer or a ghosting philosopher. He has been both of these, but he can now claim the final touch of greatness, which I feel that Mr. Duffin, good friend though he may be, has missed.

JOHN BAYLISS

The White Goddess by ROBERT GRAVES (Faber and Faber, 30s.).

THE initial appearance last year of this fascinating and provocative work made a negligible impression among the ranks of the Fleet Street literati. Nothing quite like it had come their way before and their first reactions appear to have been not unmixed with that fear of the unknown which has always been such an amusing feature of their slick pens, when confronted with anything outside the parrot-cage limits of their experience. Those reviewers who did find space for it in their overloaded columns performed their usual feat of obliteration with a heap of meaningless platitudes. It was obviously far too much for them and the fact that it has to do with poetry, the displaced art of post-war Europe in which the majority of the readers have no interest whatsoever, gave them a facile excuse for passing by a book comparable in importance to *The Golden Bough*

It must be conceded that it is not an easy book to read and Robert Graves admits that this result of his research into the history of poetic myth is 'a very difficult book as well as a very queer one'. The difficulties are certainly present, but the fascination and suggestion that leap like wayward sprites from every page make the task exciting and rewarding. This book is, above all else, a starting point for further research, and it is one of the failures of the author's presentation that there is an almost complete absence of bibliographical references. It is hardly possible to turn over a page without encountering, 'It looks as if . . .' or 'There seems to have been . . .' and these tentative pleas for attention are usually followed by a mass of complicated detail that cries out for documentation. These ambiguities are unavoidable in a work of such an explanatory nature, but by omitting to provide a comprehensive list of the sources of his information Mr. Graves places unnecessary obstacles in the way of further research.

There is, however, nothing ambiguous about his definition of the function of poetry and it is necessary that we who still remain faithful to the art should take notice. 'The function of poetry', writes Mr. Graves, 'is religious invocation of the Muse; its use is the experience of mixed exaltation and horror that her presence excites.' Nothing more and nothing less; and the comparative failure of many of the would-be poets of the last twenty years is a measure of their inability to comprehend this simple

truth. The language of all valid poetry is a language of poetic myth, a magical grammar that stems from the ancient cults of the Moon-goddess and has been the coinage of poetry since the Early Stone Age and from Edmund Spenser to Dylan Thomas. 'The truth is, that only gold can be turned into gold; only poetry into poems.' There is no room for the synthetic in the practice of poetry.

Mr. Graves bases his argument on an examination of the Hanes Taliesin and of Cad Goddeu. They are two Welsh minstrel poems from the thirteenth century: the former being the Tale of Taliesin, a sixth-century bard and the latter, the Battle of the Trees. Within the tortuous mysteries of these two poems is hidden the secret alphabet of the trees, upon which is based the whole invocatory grammar of poetry. The way through this maze of myth, legend and religious incantation is obscure and treacherous, and the reader often finds himself in danger of losing touch with his guide. One sympathizes with Mr. Graves when, after sorting out some of the valid lines from the confused mass of poems that go to make up the best available version of the Cad Goddeu, he writes, 'I leave the other pieces included in this medley to be sorted out by someone else'. Having cleared the ground of some of the cunningly placed decoys, the search is on; and how intriguing it all is cannot be conveyed within the limitations of a review.

The cult of the White Goddess was not confined to the early civilizations, and Mr. Graves explores the different guises under which she carried on her subversive activities behind the veils of the world religions, not excepting Christianity, until the end of the seventeenth century. The rift dividing Christianity and poetry is seen by Mr. Graves in the struggle between priest and poet for the souls of Donne, Herrick, Hopkins, and others. The struggle cannot be ignored, even when, as in the cases of Donne and Hopkins, it is fought out on a high level of mysticism, but it is not certain that Mr. Graves is right when he asserts that poetry cannot flourish unless the priest abdicates in favour of the poet. To pose the question as to whether Hopkins can 'be commended for humbly submitting his poetic ecstasies to the confession-box' is to leave the problem unaffected and to expose one of those sweeping statements that occur far too frequently in this book.

An interesting theory is advanced by the author to explain the fact that many of our young poets cease to write after passing

their mid-twenties. It is not necessarily due to a lack of patronage, or to the economic impossibilities of a life devoted to poetry, but to the death of the poetic impulse. This, suggests Mr. Graves, may be due to their elevation to some other plane of experience above the poetic, thus denying their vocation as poets. Or it may be due to the poet marrying the woman who has been his Muse, but who soon becomes just another housewife demanding domesticity in her husband. Accept those demands and the poet loses touch with the White Goddess, 'who is anti-domestic; the perpetual "other woman" '.

It is a pretty problem for the poet to solve, for his search for the elusive Goddess will lead inevitably and always to failure. To capture her and fasten her with the bonds of the family is to destroy her.

Mr. Graves goes on to suggest that a return to a matriarchal society, which would release our suppressed desires for Mother-worship for adoration of the Goddess, might lead to freedom for the poet without incurring the wrath of society.

This book is full of provocative suggestions for the poet and should occupy a prominent place on his bookshelves until his work of research begun by Mr. Graves is completed by another hand.

B. EVAN OWEN

After the Bombing by EDMUND BLUNDEN (Macmillan, 6s.).

The Distaff Muse. An Anthology of Poetry written by Women. Compiled by CLIFFORD BAX and MEUM STEWART. (Hollis and Carter, 10s. 6d.).

THE peaceful world of Edmund Blunden is a long way away from the twentieth-century chaos of colour television, electroencephalograms and small literary reviews. He is to be read in the Conservative Club of a cathedral town, along with *Country Life* and Trollope. The deeper the armchair the better, because it will make all the more enjoyable the deck-chair memories brought back by the address to Hammond:

> *Since our most beautiful and subtle game*
> *First grew from England's leas and levels green,*
> *In turn its champions in their genius came—*

It takes a faithful Englishman to treat cricket so seriously and so lightly at the same time. His love of the English countryside gives the warmth and reality to his verse and sometimes in a few lines he can describe wide contrasts in one landscape:

> *The Guinness gospel on the wall*
> *Remains all clear, the soldier stares*
> *That way; the lawns and statues wait*
> *For sunshine and society.*

The countryside is usually closely associated with its literary heritage—Shelley, Wordsworth and Byron are close to Mr. Blunden's thoughts as he meditates on town, village and country house. One of the most delightful things in the book is the translation from the Latin of William Lyly's *Rules for Schoolboys,* widely used from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. The Ministry of Education might consider circulating copies to all schools. The rules are still relevant.

There is very little feeling of 'after the bombing' in this collection. It is rather as though the bombing had never happened.

'Women have always been allowed to publish verse,' say the compilers of this collection, 'perhaps because it is not a highly saleable commodity and also because it was regarded, like 'sketching' and harp-playing as an elegant accomplishment'. In

spite of this background however, women poets have always been regarded as a little freakish; they are thought to be a contradiction in terms. They fall into obvious and distinct classes, the Girton type, the Chelsea type and the olde-worlde-Sussex type unconciously they do their best to be off-putting. Occasionally they write well enough to rank as equals with men, but it must be admitted that the occasions are few. Mr. Bax and Miss Stewart feel that this is a dreary conventional view, and that justice has not been done. They feel that 'if there were no sex distinction in literature we should be, as in life itself, immeasureably the poorer. Fortunately it is only mediocre writers who can write as though they were neuters'. But there is surely a difference between the artistic *androgyne* and the mere eunuch. If poetry is not judged *as poetry*, irrespective of authorship, then the judgment is inevitably on a lower level. It will perhaps be graceful and polite, but parochial all the same, however fascinating the details of the writer's sex-life.

The title sets the maiden's bower atmosphere and the biographical notes have a cosy gossipy ring. The sonnets by Mary Stuart, presumably addressed to Bothwell, are fascinating but sad reading. The Scots ballads, and their authoresses, are also delightful. I was pleased to find one of my own favourite poems, written by a self-educated servant girl who died of measles at the age of twenty-four, *Upon her Play being returned to her stained with Claret*. Presumably the compilers were only concerned with British writers, because otherwise Emily Dickinson is obviously missing.

The compilers found that modern times had led women writers into feminist attitudes; it is sad that the poor dears have been forced to forsake the distaff and harp for the typewriter. But even contemporary poets of all sexes have their moments of relaxation, during which they will enjoy the intimacy of this anthology, preferably read by a pink-shaded bedside lamp.

MARGARET CROSLAND.

HAMISH HENDERSON, *Elegies for the Dead in Cyrenaica* (John Lehmann, 6s.). E. N. DA C. ANDRADE, *Poems and Songs* (Macmillan, 7s. 6d.).

DURING the war years the deserts of North Africa seem to have had the power of evoking poetry as remarkable as the prose we associate with those of Arabia. Hamish Henderson's *Elegies for the Dead in Cyrenaica,* which deservedly won the Somerset Maugham Award for 1949, is a transmutation into poetry, hard, direct, uncompromising, of the experience of warfare in the desert. In reading any war poetry at the present time one thinks inevitably of Keyes and Alun Lewis; Henderson is with them, and not with the purveyors of versified reportage which has too often been fobbed off on us as the poetry of the war. There is no single poem here to bear comparison with *The Wilderness,* but the book is a whole where the work of Keyes and Lewis, fine though it is, remains fragmentary, an astonishing promise.

In a foreword Henderson tells us that his theme was suggested to him by the remark of a captured German officer: 'Africa changes everything. In reality we are allies, and the desert is our common enemy'. The illusive mirage effects of the desert became for him 'a symbol of our human civil war, in which the roles seem constantly to change and the objectives to shift and vary. . . . Above all, perhaps, the doppelgaenger symbol allowed me to re-state in dialectical terms the endless problem of how to safeguard our human house'. It is in the combination of dialectic and passion that the force and value of these poems lie. The poet speaks for 'the dead, the innocent', and his claim to speak for them is not to be denied. His poems are written towards the expiation of our survival. He has succeeded in vividly particularizing the conflict he celebrates and in making of it an urgent, troubling symbol of our human predicament. War appalls him as it does every intelligent man; but he has a Highland appreciation of the virtue of *gaisge* (valour), and he can sing unforgettably of the terrible joy of battle:

Yes, hill and shieling
sea-loch and island, hear it, the yell
of your war-pipes, scaling sound's mountains
guns thunder drowning in their soaring swell!

—The barrage gulfs them: they're gulfed in the
clumbering guns,
gulfed in gloom, gloom. Dumb in the blunderbuss black—
lost—gone in the anonymous cataract of noise.
Now again! The thrill war-song: it flaunts
aggression to the sullen desert. It mounts. Its scream
tops the valkyrie, tops the colossal artillery.

A tremendous pity informs these elegies, but it is a pity given edge and power by the poet's intellectual and emotional honesty. It is no vapid or meaningless pity, but that of an intelligent and angry man asking

O to right them
what requiem can I sing in the ears of the living?

Henderson's gifts are many. In addition to intelligence, honesty, passion, he has an ear for the sounding phrase, where the sound is there not for its own sake but for that of the meaning:

and be impaled on the basalt pinnacles of darkness.
Armour has foregathered, snuffling
through tourbillions of fine dust,
down the thunderous cataract of day.

His occasional lapses into bathos—in the *Seventh Elegy* (Seven Good Germans) and the second part of the *Ninth* (Fort Capuzzo)—though obviously intended for that 'sensuous austerity' he desiderates in the *Prologue* are all the more regrettable. But we can assent to his claim that he has 'understood the meaning of the hard word pietas', we can salute a volume of brave and moving poetry, and we can look forward to the future work of this outstanding young poet.

After the hard thought and passion of the *Elegies,* Professor Andrade's *Poems and Songs* are water after wine. His publishers claim that he has affinities with the Elizabethans and Jacobeans. This is nonsense, and does a disservice to these inoffensive verses which should please those who find Eliot obscure, Auden difficult and Dylan Thomas delirious. Those who are interested in poetry, if they venture beyond the arch Preface, will find only debased rhythms, a second-hand vocabulary and trite sentiments.

T. H. JONES

THE PEACEABLE KINGDOM OF MARIANNE MOORE

From the *Quarterly Review of Literature* (Vol. IV, No. 2). U.S.A.

'This is a strange fraternity.'
'. . . formal as the scales of a fish.'
'Liking an elegance of which the source is
not bravado . . . knows by heart the antique . . .'
'Where there is personal liking we go.'
'Acknowledgments seem only honest.'

ELIZUR WRIGHT, an American, and apparently the first comprehensive Englisher of La Fontaine's *Fables*, in a preface to the 1841 edition of his translation, wrote:

> *Human nature, when fresh from the hand of God, was full of poetry. Its sociality could not be pent within the bounds of the actual. To the lower inhabitants of air, earth, and water,—and even to those elements themselves, in all their parts and forms,—it gave speech and reason. The skies it peopled with beings, on the noblest model of which it could have any conception—to wit, its own!*

It is precisely Marianne Moore's 'sociality which could not be pent within the bounds of the actual'. It is her social shuttling from the actual to the imagined, or from what is imaginable in the actual, to its actuality, that is at once the key and the meaning to her charmed movement between the human and the animal kingdom.

Historically, fable was a mere auxiliary to impassioned discourse. The great fabulists of antiquity were orators first. Marianne Moore is in the tradition of the great fabulists, for her method is the method of discourse. The differential resides in her *tone* which is conversational, rather than rhetorical. Thus, while in intention and framework she takes over the heritage of the fable, she feels quite free to ignore its stock trappings. One rigid convention of the fable is that animals are given human speech. Miss Moore's animals hardly ever speak, although she speaks to them. What remains in common with the fabulists is the descriptive element (but more closely executed than by the fabulists), the animal revealed in some characteristic

action (but with Miss Moore narrated rather than dramatized), and the concluding sententia, which in her work is always a new and delicately stated relationship in the realm of conduct rather than, as with La Fontaine and the tradition he utilized so wittily, a brisk climax of proverbial wisdom.

But there are other differences, too. There is, in Miss Moore's work, a vast emblematic heraldry of symbols cunningly disguised in zoological, ornithological, botanical or piscatorial forms. Always her quaint animals are meant to illuminate qualities and they are not necessarily human ones. In the oriental fable or in those of La Fontaine, one does not find the animals acting *themselves* out, as do Miss Moore's, to give us knowledge of humanity; instead, the fabulist endows the animal with human traits and attributes. With Miss Moore the animals *as* animals count for just as much as the humans they may eventually inform. In her exotic cosmology it is always a real elephant, a *real* dragon, and a real man (if there is a man at all in her oddly-denuded-of-humans domain). Once we have seen them clearly, the points at which their respective spheres of conduct touch are lit up. We see the elephant *as* (not *is*) man; the man *as* (not *is*) elephant. Qualities are reciprocal, mutually illuminating, and serve to adumbrate a huge transcendental correspondence of eidolons in a pantheistic, Emersonian sense.

In the end, it is not only people we understand better, but animals too. Whenever Marianne Moore describes *real* people, like her imagined Swedish lady in *A Carriage From Sweden*, she does so in terms of birds, and beasts and flowers:

> *. . . And how beautiful, she*
> *with the natural stoop of the*
> *snowy egret, grey-haired and straight-haired,*
> *for whom it should come to the door,—*
> *of whom it reminds me. The split-*
>
> *pine hair, steady gannet-clear*
> *eyes and the pine-needled-path-deer*
> *swift step; . . .*

In *The Jerboa* man and the natural universe interact in the most casual yet effective way on the levels of culture and morality. The poem's scheme is a lyrical notation of varieties of *made* animal objects in early cultures and also their *real* animal referents. The piece while notable for its music (there is a daring usage

of identical words both as internal and end-rhyme) also relies on assonance[1] for wit, a risky (almost punning) practice which Miss Moore manages gallantly:

. . . Course

the jerboa, or
plunder its food store,
and you will be cursed. . . .

In *The Frigate Pelican* the human application of this remarkable bird is overt. He is compared to Handel as he 'hides/in the height and in the majestic/display of his art . . . a true knight'. *Peter* (about a house cat) begins on an amusing domestic note and ends as a powerful plea for fidelity to one's own nature. Peter does as he likes, doesn't 'sit caged by the rungs of a domestic chair [which] would be unprofitable—human. What is the good of hypocrisy?'

. . . When one is
frank, one's very
presence is a compliment. It is clear that he can see
the virtues of naturalness, that he is one of those
who do not regard
the published fact as a surrender . . .

Sometimes, as in *Nine Nectarines and Other Porcelain,* Miss Moore cannot contain her pleasure in the correspondences she finds:

We cannot find flaws
in this emblematic group

Although Miss Moore always looks for (and finds!) equivalences in her close studies of the animal kingdom, she has the humility and the humour to wonder, now and then, as in *The Buffalo* if her 'signifyings' are not fictive:

[1] I am using 'assonance' here to mean imperfect rhyme. This follows Saintsbury's usage.

. . . The
soot brown tail-tuft on
a kind of lion-
tail; what would that express?
. . .
. . . Yet
some would say the sparse-haired
buffalo has met
human notions best—

And in *Snakes, Mongooses, Snakecharmers And The Like* she reproaches herself: 'The passion for setting people right is itself an afflictive disease'.

This reduction of people to animal-size moral scale (see *The Zoo,* for example), while not a 'disease' reflects a curious need: the need to manipulate, rearrange, and classify like a working scientist on *order-able* levels. It is this need which keeps Marianne Moore from being a novelist of manners. When one solves problems in the animal kingdom, no matter how intimate and tracery-fine the observation, the problems posed by pressures of context don't exist, (at least not in the same way) as they do in the social universe. Still, Marianne Moore's direction is a will to *order* as all satire, criticism, grows from a will to place, to judge. Her universe is really, then, the universe of a Jane Austen, a universe of manners but translated to the animal sphere. Is this not clever—to have found an 'objective correlative' (which first she instructs us of as in a learned travelogue) to carry the weight of her need for judging? Basically, Miss Moore is interested in character as are the fiction-writers. But, and this marks the difference, in spite of their particularity, her 'characters' are as didactically charged as the figures in a morality play. It is well to notice that it is only the most admirable and adventurous of the animals which seem to entertain her.

II

While it may be useful to say that, as a fabulist, Marianne Moore's first interest is conduct, this term must be further defined. For, in her ideal sense, conduct is an art, and conversely, art is a kind of fastidious conduct. Thus, there is a fiery relationship between morality and art, but in an inverted Tolstoyan sense: that

is to say, her aesthetic becomes an ethic, and not the other way around. Like almost every significant twentieth-century writer, Henry James, Joyce, Proust, Eliot, Woolf, to mention only a few, Miss Moore has written at some length about the problem of the artist and of art. But in her delineation, one feels no agony, no conflict; she *knows* what art is about and she will tell any fool who can take her astringent asperity. In *Novices,* a stinging satire of the novices who

> *anatomize their work*
> . . .
> *the little assumptions of the sacred ego confusing the issue*
> *so that they do not know 'whether it is the buyer or the*
> *seller who gives the money'—*
> *an abstruse idea plain to none but the artist,*
> *the only seller who buys and holds on to the money.*
> *Because one expresses oneself and entitles it wisdom, one*
> *is not a fool. What an idea!*

The poem is built around a subtle but sharply pointed contrast: the novices, 'blind to the right word, deaf to satire . . . [who] . . . write the sort of thing that would in their judgment interest a lady'; are opposed, in a brilliantly onamatapoetic reconstruction, to the genius of Hebrew poetry 'this drama of water against rocks' which the novices have rejected as 'the stuffy remarks of the Hebrews'.[2] In *The Labours of Hercules,* about the creative process, in *The Monkeys,* a literary zoo, (one of the few places, significantly, where an animal is given speech), in *Poetry* ('I too dislike it'), that much-quoted and peppery spray of wit against those who charge 'unintelligibility', in *To A Snail,* on the problem of style, (clearly obligated to some of Kenneth Burke's early foreshadowings of 'the container and the thing contained'), in *Pedantic Literalist* (not successful because it imitates the qualities it seeks, obliquely, to condemn: this is the pathetic fallacy on the ideological level), and in many other poems, the *critical* function of *art as a mode of conduct* is elaborated through Miss Moore's animal symbolism or through shadowy

[2]This reconstruction is no less brilliant because it is a mosaic of quotations from five different sources ranging from the *Decameron* to *The Expositor's Bible.*

and abstract humans, usually addressed in the plural (*Novices, Critics and Connoisseurs,* etc.).

The way in which Miss Moore's aesthetic merges with her ethic is effectively stated in *Critics and Connoisseurs,* where she writes: 'There is a great amount of poetry in unconscious fastidiousness' and then goes on to say that she likes best the imperfect human effort:

> *. . . a*
> *mere childish attempt to make an imperfectly ballasted*
> *animal stand up*
> *similar determination to make a pup*
> *eat his meals from the plate.*
> *. . .*
> *. . . I have seen this swan and*
> *I have seen you; I have seen ambition without*
> *understanding in a variety of forms; . . .*

In *Picking and Choosing,* a discourse on her contemporaries and their artistic values, which seems, like many of her poems in this vein, to be addressed to the critics, she makes clear her identification of creation, conduct, with the focus of the artist's personality.

> *Literature is a phase of life.*
> *. . .*
> *. . . It is not Hardy*
> *the distinguished novelist and Hardy the poet, but*
> *one man*
> *'interpreting life through the medium of the emotions'.*

The Monkey Puzzle (a deliberately prosaic title) would seem to be Miss Moore's final comment on 'beauty' (art), what it is and how it got to be that way:

> *this is beauty—'a certain proportion in the skeleton*
> *which gives the best results'.*

And she concludes with modest, yet characteristically practical, acceptance: 'But we prove, we do not explain our birth'.

III

While, on the whole, I agree with Mr. Eliot's statement that 'Miss Moore has no immediate poetic derivations' I should like to examine some aspects of her work which, I think, reveal a striking 'appreciation' (to borrow a word Miss Moore has made quite especially her own) for qualities she finds in other poetry and seeks to infuse into her own.

In *The Poets of the Old Testament* by A. R. Gordon, a book to which Miss Moore refers several times in her notes, and from which she quotes extensively in the poems, we find in an analysis of the properties of the Hebrew language:

> *But this very failure of the philosophical grasp enhances the pictorial power of the speech. The verb is the predominant element in the sentence. And though the shades of time-distinction are blurred, the richness of the language in intensive forms shows the precise complexion of the act in a clear, strong light. . . . Hebrew possesses likewise a great wealth of synonyms, especially in descriptions of the common scenes and interests of life, and in the region of feeling. The language is equally rich in imagery.*

While the composite effect of Marianne Moore's poems is similar to that of the 'little paired playthings' she so admires in ancient cultures, they are internally rather more like living, breathing miniatures of a wonderfully rich and active sort. Always, within the formal, Persian mosaic of her structure we get the realistic sensation of movement. It is instructive to notice her verbs, for it is through them that we are compelled to accept the reality of her extraordinary acquaintance with the animal kingdom. We are made to see even the most exotic beast in action and reaction. She sees swans 'reconnoitreing', the frigate pelican 'wasting the moon', lizards 'spanning the bushes', the fish 'wade through black jade', a tiger 'coughs', the sparrow 'decoys' his decoyers, the Malay dragon 'dives head-first', the pangolin 'endures exhausting solitary trips'; it is always nature 'mechanicked' and alerted, not nature as still-life that she gives us. If this were not enough to suggest that Miss Moore has profited by her interest in the

Hebrew poets, there is also a structural similarity to be noted.[3] For Miss Moore's method is essentially additive. To this method the 'synthetic-constructive' and 'climatic-ascending' types of Hebrew poetic structure are most congenial. These forms would, I think, account for the musical structure of her poems, for their design forces a kind of response. It is this responsive element, common to all Oriental poetry, which complicates and enriches the line of her movement. Note, for example, *The Frigate Pelican* which, for all its speculative impetus, is really a song-dance arrangement, a spun joyousness, all celerity, echo, and movement.

Another qualification I would put upon Mr. Eliot's judgment of Miss Moore's lack of 'immediate derivations' stems from the integral cast of her method which is, in essence, that of the librarian. Anyone who thinks a card catalogue dull will not follow my implication. In the librarian's province one finds the most brilliantly *literal* demonstration of the simultaneity of the past with other pasts, and the simultaneity of all of the past with the present. (To say nothing at all of the presentness of the present!) Who, except an inspired, not to say dedicated, librarian would read the *London Illustrated News,* along with *What to See in America, Horary Astrology,* Xenophon's *Cygneticus,* a Bell Telephone leaflet, *The World's Most Accurate Clocks,* the *Vest Pocket Manual of Printing,* and a government *Report on Introduction of Domestic Reindeer into Alaska?* And, after all, is it not what the poet in Miss Moore makes of the librarian's materials that is the 'content' of her poetry? This vast, librarian-like omniverousness of curiosity is what makes Miss Moore so very much *of* her time, while at the same time, enabling her to be unbound by it. Her meticulousness in the use of quotation marks is not nearly so much an affectation as some would suggest.[5] On the contrary, it is another facet of the librarian in Miss Moore, supporting her temperamental honesty.

[3] For additional evidence of her interest in Hebrew poetry, see *The Past is the Present,* a delightful discourse on free-verse, in which she threatens to revert to Habakkuk, quoting one who says:

> *'Hebrew poetry is*
> *prose with a sort of heightened consciousness.'*

See, too, *England* (really England versus America) for her description of 'the cataclysmic torrent of emotion compressed in the verbs of the Hebrew language'.

Miss Moore's method, in short, is the method of *The Monkey Puzzle* '. . . we prove, we do not explain our birth.' Her quotations are a way of proving, not explaining, for to her that would seem presumptuous. It is only the 'poet-prophet,' like a Milton, whose egoism presumes 'to justify the ways of God to man' (not a Christian obligation, in the first place). Miss Moore, for all her elegant morality, for all that she is a didact, is entirely humble. She is not a prophet-preacher manqué; if we think her that we misplace her vision, which is not that of the visionary but that of the scientist, the scientist of conduct and value. The notes appended to her poems are meant to reaffirm the quotations acknowledged in the poems, that is to say, to *prove* (or test) that order of knowledge which is a poem.[2]

This kind of mind while, like La Fontaine's, one which 'is wholly at home. La Fontaine's mind was exceedingly domestic. It was nowhere but at home', is capable of the most extraordinary imaginative journeys. *No Swan So Fine,* interesting for the way it dramatizes the integrality of her titles to her poetry (titles often functioning as first lines) is useful as an illustration—it is a short poem and the traffic is easier to follow—of the way a casual newspaper sentence can lead Miss Moore into a quiet elegy. In *The Plumet Basilisk,* one of her most successful long poems, we are so enchanted by the beautifully observed descriptions of this exotic lizard, that we accept the strange territory on terms of intimacy. Suddenly, when we think we have completely understood the actions of these talented animals, we get a brilliant generalization, on an entirely different level of observation:

> *the plumet portrays*
> *mythology's wish*
> *to be interchangeably man and fish*

[2] There is a significant distinction in the precision with which Miss Moore acknowledges quotations, and the casualness with which some of her most distinguished contemporaries lift them. Often, in modern poetry, the borrowing, whether acknowledged or unacknowledged, is to get the shock of recognition, or of irony, or of both. Miss Moore's is to get the confirmation of addition, for as I have already remarked, her method is essentially additive.

If Miss Moore's reading did not furnish sufficient proof of her being very much alive to her age, her occasional echoes of her contemporaries would do so. While Mr. Eliot has noted a possible obligation to H. D. in Miss Moore's early verse, his own influence is not absent. A sentence like 'The tune's illiterate footsteps fail' proves Miss Moore to have read him closely, while the cadence of her charming address to

> *Small dog, going over the lawn, nipping the linen*
> *and saying*
> *that you have a badger—remember Xenophon.*

is an Eliotic reminder of his last lines on Phlebas the Phoenician. Her use of adjectives and nouns compounded with negatives is like e.e. cummings' and serves, as in his usage, to emphasize more than would an antonym the quality absent or present. In a fairly early poem, she writes:

> *. . . The college student*
> *named Ambrose sits on the hill-side*
> *with his not-native books and hat*

Some of the shorter poems (see *An Egyptian Pulled Glass Bottle in the Shape of a Fish*) suggest a sensitive ear for Emily Dickinson's whimsicalities of rhyme. Her romantic aesthetic in '. . . it is a privilege to see so/much confusion . . .' reminds me of her friend, William Carlos Williams', 'It's the anarchy of poverty delights me . . .' In *A Grave,* the summaries by which she binds together her enumerated concretia, as well as a tendency to cement her rhetoric with connectives like 'however' are devices she either takes from or shares with John Crowe Ransom, whose particular tone is also one of address.

But once one has noted Miss Moore's possible obligations to the poetic climate of her times, one still has to deal with the fundamental uniqueness of her achievement. I believe insufficient attention has been given to the fact that her verse is, on the whole, syllabic, rather than accentual. *The Fish* (one of her most exquisitely worked-out metaphors) will serve as a useful illustration of this practice. There are eight stanzas of five lines, each with a recurring syllabic pattern of 1, 3, 9, 6, 8, the final longish line of each stanza connecting with and carrying over to the first two or three short lines of the next stanza. What this accomplishes is a run-on pattern of movement very much like that of

'prose with a heightened consciousness', or speech. For it should be noted that contrary to the historical confusions about the possibilities for syllabic verse in English, in actuality, experimental studies have shown that stress and syllabic length tend to coincide; and, in addition, both the *heard* patterns of accent, normal to speech, as well as Miss Moore's generous usage of end rhymes (in this poem aabbc, ddeef, etc.) set up a counterpoint against which the syllabic pattern makes its way. The result is a very complex and rich range of metrical possibilities within the given syllabic scheme of any poem.[3] The first two stanzas will serve to illustrate:

THE FISH

wade
through black jade
Of the crow-blue mussel-shells, one keeps
adjusting the ash-heaps;
opening and shutting itself like
an
injured fan.

The barnacles which encrust the side
of the wave, cannot hide
there for the submerged shafts of the

Now, as with any highly individual poet (we need think only of Milton, Donne or Hopkins), Miss Moore's defects are an excess of her felicities. *Those Various Scalpels,* for example, is almost a parody of herself with its talky, polysyllabic vocabulary, its highly qualitative and adverbialized syntax and its rather abstract argumentation. This poem might be profitably compared with *People's Surroundings* in which Miss Moore's rather too frequent opposition of modernity and antiquity comes off with humour, grace and real point.

[3] Not all of Miss Moore's poems are syllabic. Also, it should be noted that the syllabification is not *necessarily* quantitative (as in classical meter) but more often is arrived at by the arbitrary French method as in *The Fish.*

III

It might be supposed from some comments I have made that Miss Moore is dissatisfied with America. All one need do to disabuse himself of this notion is to re-read *What Are Years* (1941) and *Nevertheless* (1944). (Who else but Marianne Moore would choose a rhetorical connective for a title!) From her earliest writing Miss Moore has displayed a deep concern for what seems to her the false opposition commonly seen between localism and internationalism. See her sharp and telling lecture on this subject in *England,* where she says of America:

> *. . . The letter*
> *a in psalm and calm when . .*
> *pronounced with the sound of a in candle is very*
> *noticeable, but*
> *why should continents of misapprehension have to be*
> *accounted for the fact? . . .*

What Are Years shows her more preoccupied with American materials of a seemingly antiquarian sort, but, as always, with a pointed critical objective. *Virginia Brittanica* is a brilliant example of the way her ethicalizing temper reconstructs the meaning of another culture through a minutely documented mosaic of concrete details. *Rigorists,* also about American history, follows a similar pattern. *Nevertheless* continues the interest in American materials on somewhat different levels. There is the affectionate nostalgia of *A Carriage from Sweden*:

> *At all events there is in Brooklyn*
> *something that makes me feel at home.*

There is, too, on another plane, the well-known *In Distrust of Merits* which, growing out of the war, seems just now doubly ironic in its high humility of generous hopes.

From *What Are Years* onward the didactic vein is stronger in Miss Moore's work, or, rather, closer to the surface. But this should not suggest a slackening in poetic power. On the contrary, while Miss Moore adheres to her strict accounting of sources (a practice she only recently abandoned in *nevertheless),* and clings to her prim quotation marks, there is also a more uniform tautness in her development of correspondences in the physical and moral universe. It isn't so much that there is *less* detail, but rather that more of the detail goes to support

the didacticism. Her work tends all the time in the direction of greater colloquialism and she more consistently uses compounded words. The effect of much of this is to make for a greater lyricism of mood, although it would be inaccurate to describe Miss Moore, one of the most musical poets writing to-day, as having become a lyric one. The musical element in Miss Moore's writing has not been enough remarked. Not only is it evident that she is a scholar of music (see her frequent allusions to composers, compositions, and even performers in the poems), but it is also clear that she aims for a *flow* in her poetic structure which can best be described as musical. For example, in *Nine Nectarines and Other Porcelain,* a long poem, one's pleasure in the poem's movement is almost entirely musical, both because of the intricate pattern of internal and end-rhyme and the characteristically daring assonance. Yet her linear arrangements, her dry adverbs ('although not uncommonly/the opposite is seen—/nine peaches on a nectarine') all tend to check, as it were, the sonal qualities of the poem by bringing it back to the basic speech-norm on which it is built. In *Walking Sticks And Paper-Weights And Water-Marks* not only is her rhyme ingenious and happy but the poem itself, like the 'fugue' of 'the pelican's community of notes' she describes in it, has an involuting three part structure, a 'chain of interactingly/linked harmony.'

In the recent verse one notes, as well, a more experimental and dramatic use of the caesura. *Spenser's Island* is a splendid example of this and is, as a matter of fact, one of Miss Moore's most personal and social presents to the reader. She utilizes the same spatial and, in effect, temporal representation of the caesura in the much-discussed *The Pangolin.* Her reading gets weirder, and she now is able to extract poetic juice from a pit. In addition, while her humour is even spritelier, there is a new note of affection for her animal and human subjects which alters the tone of her discourse.

The last two collections show up Miss Moore as increasingly the taker of unpopular stands. *He Digesteth Harde Yron* is a fine display of the exactitude of her diagnostic sensibility. For Marianne Moore is essentially a Protestant individualist, the intense and uncompromising exponent of an individualism in value and belief which, like Milton's Protestantism, is, at root, without

any orthodox theological anchorage.[4] As with Milton, it is the intensity of her protest which sometimes raises the emotion to an almost religious power, a white-heat of *ethical* judgment which, in both poets, may stem not only from temperamental factors but also from their regard for the Hebrew 'ideal' in poetry. Miss Moore, like Milton, had, in an early poem, *Marriage*, examined that resistant paradox at some length. It is an exceedingly clever inquiry into the actuality and the potentials of

> *this amalgamation which can never be more*
> *than an interesting possibility*

which she concludes with a conventionalized and tersely-stated wedding-portrait (for so I interpret the closing lines), meant to re-enforce the impossibility of the amalgamation:

> *the Book on the writing table;*
> *the hand in the breast pocket.*[5]

Unlike Milton, the most positive attitude she can muster toward marriage is the perceptive wit of '... why not be alone together?'

In *Black Earth*, a study of personality as opposed to character, Ramon Fernandez, she again touches the kernel of the paradox she drew in *Marriage*, although here she is not specifically concerned with that 'interesting possibility'. An opposition is posited between 'external poise' (character) and 'spiritual poise' (personality).

In *In the Days of Prismatic Colour* she launches into a deeply protestant, anti-mystical study of the genesis of 'morality' and 'sin'. She declares herself against the 'dismal fallacy' 'that all truth must be dark'.

[4] Miss Moore has written of herself: 'I am a Presbyterian and was brought up in the home of my grandfather, the Reverend John P. Warner . . . my brother has been a chaplain for twenty years in the Navy . . . And the books to which I have had access have been, on the whole, serious . . .'

[5] In this very long poem occur two lines which rank among her best. I detect in them a sly dig at Milton's solemnity:

> *Unnerved by the nightingale*
> *and dazzled by the apple*

When it comes to the institutional level of social experience Miss Moore is as uncompromisingly questioning as one could wish of an Emile. But her protest, unlike Rousseau's, is not motivated by a naïf romanticism. It is an entirely rational, although impassioned, rejection of the academy that she makes in *The Student.*

IV

This, then, is the 'strange fraternity' of man and beast into which Miss Moore initiates us. Like La Fontaine, who missed his dinner once when observing an anthill where a funeral seemed to be under way, since 'He could not in all decency leave until it was over', Marianne Moore has an exquisite tact toward her ant-hills and ant-eaters. She is again like that La Fontaine who 'did not philosophize over the animals; [but] sympathized with them'. And as in his work, there is in her cosmology the same impeccable morality of ordering which is one way of actively accepting the world. For La Fontaine, like Marianne Moore, 'took his world quietly'. And, while I do not wish to seem to pronounce an elegy upon Miss Moore's very presence and present achievement, I am impressed with the appropriateness to her own merits of the words La Bruyère addressed to the Academy upon La Fontaine's death in 1693: 'He instructs while he sports, persuades men to virtue by means of the beasts, and exalts trifling subjects to the sublime; a man unique in his species of composition, always original, whether he invents or translates, who has gone beyond his models, himself a model hard to imitate, La Fontaine's aim was to instruct; but Miss Moore's is to illuminate.

To all this Marianne Moore brings something, a certain plastic *extension* of the sensibility into imaginative universes of which La Fontaine, had not, I think, any perception. It is *that* imaginery animal kingdom of the soul and the intellect which is at once uniquely her possession and her gift to us. We can say of it that, like her *Spenser's Island,* it is:

> *the kindest place I've never been*
> *the greenest place I've never seen.*

VIVIENNE KOCH

POETRY OR EXAM PAPER?

The Editor,
Poetry Quarterly

Dear Sir,

I should like to make some comment upon Miss Eithne Wilkins' review of the recent translation by Messrs. Phillips and Schimanski of Rilke's *The Lay of Love and Death of Cornet Christopher Rilke*. I hasten to state that I am not a German scholar, and accelerate further to anticipate Miss Wilkins' retort that I am not therefore qualified to express an opinion; feeling as I do, that a translation from a foreign language is primarily intended for those not acquainted with the original work.

I do not doubt Miss Wilkins' perceptivity of the fine shades of Rilke's mother-tongue; my objection rests on the misuse of a literary review for the demonstration of such a proficiency. What, from Miss Wilkins, do we learn of this work, hitherto untranslated into English? What is its subject, its structure; what thoughts and feelings informed it? Had Miss Wilkins offered some information of this kind, we would surely be in a better position to follow her case against the alleged erring translators.

The merits and demerits of the translation must, of course, rest with the critic who is also a German scholar. But whilst Miss Wilkins, who presumably fulfils both of these requirements, has provided her own English rendering of certain fragmentary phrases, I do not find that her diction exceeds in poetic value those passages which she so deplores in the translation in question; nor that her prowess in this field justifies three and a half pages of school-marm corrections.

The translation of a poem, after all, must be judged as a work of art, and not as an examination paper.

Yours faithfully,

MURIEL SPARK

FLOWERS FROM STRANGE LANDS

The Editor,
Poetry Quarterly
7 Crown Passage
Pall Mall, S.W.1

25th October, 1949

Sir,

I am writing to express my appreciation of an anonymous critic in *Nine* who did me the honour of singling out two examples of my prose for elucidation. As it is doubtful whether the editor of that magazine might care to print my letter, I take this opportunity of voicing my thanks.

Perhaps I have been singly fortunate in finding adverse criticism almost solely amongst those writers for whom the English idiom is foreign or outmoded. First of all there was Tambimuttu who took me to task from the Cingalese standpoint. Next came a broadside from Nicholas Moore who seems to prefer American usage, and thirdly I find myself criticized in basic English for transcending the nursery levels of speech. This last comment is all the more pertinent in that it appears in a magazine whose Editorial offers the reader as delightful a pot-pourri of pretentious writing as one is likely to discover nowadays. What, in God's name, does the following passage mean, to cull but one ambiguous blossom? 'The common problem of art and of life is to move in a fixed (but multi-dimensional) direction from a fixed point of departure. To extrapolate an already developing curve.' Beside such curious instructions for travelling, my own gnomic utterances, I would hazard, are quite plain.

I am only waiting now for some reviewer on a little magazine in the island of Rodonda to compliment me on my execrable style before thinking myself a second Henry James.

Yours & etc.

DEREK STANFORD

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